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A GLANCE AT LINGUISTICS--ITS RELEVANCE TO THE AUDIO-LINGUAL METHOD IN THE TEACHING OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES.

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A KNOWLEDGE OF LINGUISTIC PRINCIPLES HELPS THE TEACHER USING THE AUDIOLINGUAL METHOD TO TEACH THE BASIC SKILLS IN THE NECESSARY ORDER OF SEQUENCE--COMPREHENSION, SPEAKING, READING, AND WRITING--WITHOUT NEGLECTING ANY OF THEM. LINGUISTIC KNOWLEDGE MAKES REALIZABLE (1) AUTOMATION OF DIFFICULT LANGUAGE ITEMS, (2) MAJOR VOCABULARY EXPANSION IN REALISTIC READING CONTEXT, (3) MASTERY OF A LIMITED AMOUNT OF MATERIAL, (4) IMPROVEMENT OF SPEECH HABITS THROUGH MIMICRY OF NATIVE SPEAKERS, AND (5) THE EXTENSION OF LEARNING WITHIN THE MASTERY FRAMEWORK. DESPITE EXISTING OPPOSITION TO LINGUISTICALLY INSPIRED AUDIOLINGUAL METHODS, IT APPEARS THAT LINGUISTICS WILL CONTINUE TO DOMINATE FOREIGN LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION. THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN THE "ILLINOIS JOURNAL OF EDUCATION," VOLUME 57, NUMBER 6, OCTOBER 1966, PAGES 23-26. (AB)

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A GLANCE AT LINGUISTICS: ITS RELEVANCE TO THE AUDIO-LINGUAL METHOD IN THE TEACHING OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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While it would be all too unfair to say that the foreign language teacher of years gone by lacked an essential knowledge of linguistic principles, it now seems reasonably possible that most of these teachers—and a considerable number yet today—failed to utilize the most basic principles of linguistic science in their classrooms.

A prevailing memory of the student's long nightmare lingers on: the two year program with emphasis upon grammar combined with the periodic vocabulary test. Comprehension and speaking were considered only secondary skills in a program which considered reading and writing the epitome of language skills. When the classroom teacher mentioned those magic phrases "good comprehension of grammar" or, "wide vocabulary", this in most cases signified the rather precocious student who was adroit at written and translation excercises. It did not signify necessarily, any ability whatsoever in actually understanding the language or being able to speak it.

Lest the reader automatically think this created an imbalance in the foreign language program, one must hasten to add that the foreign language teacher of that day created an elaborate and complicated defense for this philosophy of foreign language teaching. There was, it was often argued, little chance for the student to travel abroad, but with a firm foundation in grammar and vocabulary, he might enjoy those literary and cultural insights into the language that he would otherwise lack. While the flexible mind may find some merit in this point of view, few had the courage to pose those pertinent questions: How many high school students really progressed into the reading of "literature"? How many students remembered those rudiments of grammar and vocabulary which the classroom teacher had considered so vitally important? For the college bound, was the traditional foreign language program no more than preparation for continuation into a program which was also stressing reading and writing at the expense of the other two basic skills? The most condemning question might simply have been: was the high school foreign language program little more than an exercise in the development of skills in isolation, not related and not always pertinent? This may reflect only progress in nonverbal skills, which is often a facile task for the readily-regimented student, the manipulative student, and the grade-conscious student.

The defense erected for traditional foreign language instruction likewise reflects a paucity of idealism today. In many cases a certain preoccupa-

tion with college placement seems to be the primary concern of the classroom teacher. There is the prevalent belief that it is a reflection upon the teacher when students do not place in more advanced sections at the university level. Admittedly, it has undoubtedly been true that university programs were often the last to adapt to the audio-lingual programs of the elementary and secondary schools, but it should be impressed upon foreign language teachers that most university placement tests now include testing on comprehension and speaking skills. In the past, many students who were well trained in comprehension and speaking skills have been penalized at the college level because of their inability to manipulate reading and writing skills. This condition is fast disappearing, and the methodology emphasized in the preparation of teachers today stresses speaking and comprehension ability as well as reading and writing.

It cannot be repeated too often that the audio-lingual method includes reading and writing as well as comprehension and speaking; the problem lies in two-year programs which do not allow ample time for all four skills. However, if the teacher understands something of the principles of linguistic science he will not exclude one skill at the expense of another. But it is imperative, initially, to teach these skills in some order of sequence—comprehension, speaking, reading, and writing. The really good traditional teacher did not totally exclude comprehension and speaking; they were only incidental to the development or reading and writing skills.

A basic knowledge of linguistic skills should have precluded the worst excesses in foreign language instruction. It would have obviated some priority being given to the sounds of the language, and emphasis placed upon valid sentences and expressions which might have been spoken by fluent natives in a realistic situation. All too many teachers have ignored the psychological value of students being able to say a few things quite well.

Since students have difficulty with matters of form and word order, these elements should be made habitual and automatic through repetition and reintroduction at all levels. The various forms of pattern practice are extremely important at the beginning level, and the acquisition of vocabulary should be a subsidiary goal at this time. Traditional teachers have argued the dullness and apathy created by the repetition or oral drills, feeling that progress can be more readily measured in the form of vocabulary, quizzes, and grammar drills. At the very least, it was felt that student interest could be sustained over a longer period of time. Many teachers overlooked the fact that vocabulary will increase rapidly once reading is begun. A redeeming consideration would have been the admission that vocabulary should be taught and practiced only in the context of real situations in order that meaning will be clarified and reinforced.

With emphasis at first placed upon audio-lingual skills, the scope of material will naturally be more limited than in the traditional approach to language instruction. The rate of progress will seem slower for the average teacher, who has been accustomed to covering specific amounts of grammar and vocabulary in "x" number of chapters. When possible, the native voice of tapes or records should be utilized, unless the classroom teacher feels that his own speed, rhythm, and intonation are sufficient. Students should not be expected to say anything which they have not heard repeatedly at normal speed and with normal intonation. The spoken language should never be slowed down, i.e., "watered down", in the fallacious belief that it will simplify learn-

ing. Oversimplification seldom creates the sense of well-being teachers expect in students; it often creates the very boredom about which the teachers voice great concern.

Whatever is new, that is introduced in the way of comprehension and speaking, should be built on the framework of that which is already known. Above all, do not expect students to say anything which they do not comprehend. As far as the teacher is concerned, let him search constantly for every possible way to reintroduce the language material and let him be sufficiently sensitive to search for new material when he feels interest is lagging or when students are capable of moving more rapidly. The classroom teacher who looks upon the application of linguistic principles as important will believe that language is primarily a spoken vehicle of communication and that growth in foreign language depends upon the formation of new habits. Language will be considered more than mere problem solving, more than mere memorization of grammar rules and unrelated vocabulary. If, in the process of making foreign language study pertinent and pleasurable and in seeing that the student is introduced to the four skills in sequence, the teacher feels that something short of the ideal goals are being reached, then a reorganization of both the foreign language program and the teacher's philosophy of language teaching is in order. The final consideration that must be made, however, is that language must be learned in a "natural" way; reading and writing are introduced only after children have a reasonably good command of aural-oral skills. To follow any other course of action is to ignore those necessary linguistic principles which are at the very crux of learning a foreign language.

It would seem to this writer that the opposition of many teachers to the various audio-lingual programs reflects nothing short of a repudiation of linguistic principles. Some secondary teachers have shown a lack of sympathy with the achievements of various FLES programs, and have condemned such programs because they did not really understand the goals of these programs. The greatest problem in foreign language articulation has been the refusal of many high school language departments to recognize the linguistic principles being utilized in the FLES programs. High school teachers often assert that incoming freshmen "can only understand and say things in the language". It should be remembered, however, that incoming students of ten years ago could not even do this.

In all fairness to traditional teachers, it should be stated that little can be accomplished in the way of application of linguistic theory in a two-year program. Here as elsewhere, it is the duty of the classroom teacher to work for an extended program—a four year high school program, and if possible, a FLES program in the grades. The neglect of many foreign language teachers in working for a broader sequence has been a crime almost without forgiveness. It should seem that their unwillingness to work for an expansion for these programs, even in the most traditional of foreign language programs, gave support to the naive belief that all that was really desired was what could be accomplished in the two-year program. If certain high school teachers gave credence to this doctrine, then what was one to expect of guidance counselors, school administrators, and foremost, the students, and the public? As in Latin, the goal of foreign language was to tell the student "you read beautifully," or "you write very well." The fact the student could not carry on a conversation in the language was immaterial.

In deference to one of the criticisms of traditional teaching, let it be con-

ceded that many audio-lingual materials have reflected an indifference to psychological concepts. The appearance of new materials and the revision of old ones have rendered this criticism invalid. Many teachers, however, continue to condemn texts and materials on the basis of judgments formed ten years ago; this lack of objectivity is not worthy of the dedicated foreign language teacher. The traditional foreign language teacher has been adroit at improvisation and adaptation with regard to the old materials. If he felt it was unnecessary to spend two weeks on the passé simplé he simply moved on. What is to preclude the same teacher from making similar adaptations with the audio-lingual materials? He can introduce traditional elements if he feels it is necessary, but only at the proper time and in the framework of the audio-lingual philosophy. The goal of all instruction must remain constant to insure the ability of the student to speak and understand with near-native proficiency.

Linguistic science is a progression from comprehension and speaking into reading and writing. The latter two are not ignored, they are not minimized; they are merely deferred. The argument that they are neglected in a good audio-lingual program is without basis. Those teachers who use this as a point of opposition are in truth badly informed as to the goals of audio-lingual instruction.

This article has perhaps used the word "tradition" to excess—"traditional" teacher, "traditional" programs, and "traditional" materials. The word is hard to define because all factors are not constant. One traditional teacher may have utilized linguistic principles twenty years ago, perhaps then referred to as the aural-oral method. The word can scarcely be used to describe the particularly dedicated foreign language teacher who taught all four skills to her students and in some order of sequence. The word "traditional" has sprung up only recently to imply in the realm of methodology what is the antithesis of the audio-lingual method. It should not convey that the really good teacher has ever ignored comprehension and speaking skills.

Linguistic principles will continue to dictate the realm and scope of foreign language instruction. Experienced teachers should be offered the chance to enroll in state and university-sponsored workshops in order to understand better the goals of applied linguistics. Likewise, applied linguistics should be a requirement for foreign language majors currently in college. While nobody is in a position to require teachers to alter classroom methodology in keeping with the findings of linguistic science, it does seem reasonable to expect all teachers to examine their teaching objectively, to be willing to experiment, and if necessary, to innovate.

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